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Secretary of Defense William J. Perry

National Defense University

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Nearly 50 years ago as a young soldier, I landed at the Port of Naha in Okinawa. I and my fellow soldiers were part of the 1541st Engineering Company, which was a small part of the Army of Occupation of Japan. I shall never forget the scene of devastation that I saw when our LST landed at Naha. Not a building was intact where this last great battle of the Pacific was fought. The southern half of the island was stripped bare of vegetation and livestock. People were living in caves and over 160,000 combatant and civilians had been killed. This was my personal exposure to the horrors of World War II, in which 50 million people died and tens a million more were maimed, orphaned, or made homeless.

After World War II, the United States resolved that we would not make the mistake we made after World War I where our disengagement from the world was followed by a new war in less than one generation. For we knew that with the emergence of nuclear weapons a new world war would be even more horrible than the last, truly risking the annihilation of humanity.

So since that time, our primary emphasis has been on preventing and deterring rather than fighting a war. Our emphasis on preventive defense began with the conversion of our former enemies -- Germany, Italy, and Japan -- into friends and indeed, into allies. The most notable example of this was the Marshall Plan, which assisted in the economic reconstruction of friends and former enemies alike in Europe after the war.

But Joseph Stalin rejected the Marshall plan for the Soviet Union and for the Eastern European countries which he dominated, and the Cold War started. During the Cold War, we kept the peace through deterrence, maintaining a strong nuclear arsenal, a large standing Army in Europe and a powerful fleet in the Pacific.

Now, the Cold War is over, and we no longer face the threat once posed by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. And so we are reducing our nuclear arsenal and our military forces based in Europe, and we are putting again, a strong emphasis on preventive defense.

Preventive defense in the Asia Pacific region is based on four pillars: alliances, regional confidence building, constructive engagement with China, and the framework agreement with North Korea.

The first pillar of preventive defense is our alliances -- alliance with Japan and alliance with Korea. These remain the linchpin of our regional security strategy and the linchpin of regional stability in Asia Pacific. Last year, the horrible incident in Okinawa became a catalyst for some in Japan to raise questions about the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance, with some calling it a relic of the Cold War. They are wrong. Both the United States and Japan know our close partnership is vital to the economic and political health of the region indeed, of the world.

We are two of the world's most powerful democracies and the two largest economies, and we share a common goal of seeing prosperity and freedom flourish around the globe. By working together, the United States and Japan have made real progress towards achieving these goals. Our cooperative efforts have kept the lid on regional conflicts; guaranteed freedom of the seas; reduced the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and promoted democracy, respect for human rights, and free markets. The security and the stability of this region depends on continued friendship and the continued alliance between the United States and Japan. This coming April, our two Presidents will sign a Joint Security Declaration reaffirming this central truth.

Besides our security relationship with Japan and Korea, we have security interests that are shared by countries throughout the Asian-Pacific region. That is why the second pillar of our preventive defense strategy includes the promotion of multilateral initiatives. These initiatives can reduce tension and promote peace throughout the region.

We encourage participation in joint military training exercises and joint peacekeeping operations. And we make full use of multilateral institutions in the area such as ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum, where nations throughout the region including the U.S., China and Japan, address our mutual interests and concerns.

To advance these multilateral security relations, I invited defense delegations from 34 Asian Pacific nations to join me in Hawaii last fall for the commemorations marking the end of World War II. That same weekend, we cut the ribbon on the Asian Pacific Center, a security study center in Honolulu where civilian and military personnel from all across the region meet and learn together. This Asian Pacific center is a counterpart to the Marshal Center in Germany, which is building comparable security relations for the nations in Eastern and Central Europe.

I am always looking for ways to advance security dialogues among defense and military establishments all over the world and at all levels from sergeants to ministers of defense. I believe that the web of official and personal ties that these dialogues create build trust and understanding and cooperation.

NATO has been forming this web in Europe with its Partnership for Peace initiative. This Partnership for Peace reaches out to the new democracies of Eastern and Central Europe,

Central Asia and yes, and Russia. And last summer, the defense leaders from all 33 democracies of the western hemisphere convened the first Defense Ministerial of the Americas in Williamsburg, Virginia.

I believe that the time has come for the defense leaders of the Asian Pacific region to begin forming our own web of security ties, and I suggest we consider convening a defense ministerial of the Asian Pacific region modeled after the meeting which we held last summer in Williamsburg.

The third pillar of our preventive defense strategy in the Asia Pacific is constructive engagement with China. Constructive engagement with China has been a consistent policy of the United States for more than 20 years under six Presidents from both parties. It will remain our policy because China is playing an increasingly important role in the security of the region -- indeed, in the security of the world. It is not hard to see why.

China's the world's most populous country with perhaps the fourth largest economy. China's already a major military power and it is engaging in an ambitious military modernization program. It is also a nuclear power and has a permanent seat in the U.N. Security Council.

All of these factors together lead to an escapable conclusion that China is a power of global significance, not of simply of regional significance. It is a fundamental fact that the United States and Chinese interests will sometimes be in harmony and sometimes be in conflict. And our policy has to take both of those into account. Both the time when we're in harmony and the times we're in conflict. We believe that through a healthy, honest dialogue we can work together where our interests are in harmony for our mutual benefit, and we can work together to reduce tensions when our interests conflict.

We do not choose engagement as a favor to China. We choose engagement as a favor to ourselves -- to serve our security interests. Engagement provides an avenue to influence China to help curb rather than to exacerbate the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Engagement provides an avenue to influence China to play a stabilizing role in unstable regions of the world where U.S. interests are very much at stake, such as the Korean Peninsula. Engagement opens lines of communication with the Peoples Liberation Army, a major player in Chinese politics that wields significant influence on such issues as Taiwan, the South China Sea, and proliferation.

By engaging the PLA directly, we can help promote more openness in the Chinese national security apparatus in its military institutions, its strategic intentions, its procurements, budgeting and operating procedures -- all of the components that make up the Chinese security institution. This will not only help promote confidence among Chinese neighbors, it will lessen the chance of misunderstandings or incidents when our forces operate in the areas where Chinese military forces are also deployed.

Critics in the United States say that instead of engaging China, we should contain China much like we did with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. These critics see a strong, growing China as an implacable threat to United States interests and believe that we must oppose China at every turn. These critics go on to assume that since containment implies opposing China at every turn, that engagement must mean accommodating China at every turn.

This line of argument is flawed. Flawed in the practical sense since containment could actually undermine our security. A China that feels encircled by U.S. containment policy is quite unlikely to cooperate on U.S. vital security objectives. And containment could actually create security problems for the United States. It could push China to accelerate its defense modernization, contributing to regional arms races and increasing the likelihood of military conflict in regional spots like North Korea, the South China Sea, and the Taiwan Strait.

Containment could also lead the United States and China to close their markets to each other and set back our efforts to persuade nations throughout the region to open not close their markets. Finally, containment would only provoke reflexive and intractable Chinese opposition to U.S. led security initiatives in the U.N. and other multilateral bodies.

The containment argument is also flawed philosophically because it presumes that engagement equals appeasement. That idea is dead wrong. Engagement is not appeasement. Engagement does not mean that the United States gladly acquiesces to policies or actions with which we disagree, such as China's ongoing human right violations. But, we will not try to isolate China over these issues. You cannot isolate a country with more than a billion people.

Engagement recognizes that the best way for changing China's policies that we don't like is through firm diplomacy and dialogue. And it recognizes that even when we strongly disagree with China, we cannot make our entire relationship hostage to a single issue -- that we still have security reasons for maintaining lines of communication.

Engagement also does not preclude us from pursuing our interests with all appropriate instruments of national power. Indeed, while we are committed to engagement, we are not committed to engagement at any price. It is important for audiences on both sides of the Pacific to understand both parts of that sentence.

In short, our policy of engagement is founded on neither faith nor idealism

-- it is instead rooted firmly in reality and in self interest. And it recognizes that seeking to contain and confront China can only slow down the pace of positive change that is occurring there.

Engagement is not only in our self interest. I believe it is also in China's self interest. But for engagement to work, China's leadership must see it that way also. It takes two to tango. It takes two to engage. Our policy accepts China at its word when it says that it wants to become a responsible world power. But China sends quite the opposite message when it conducts missile tests and large military maneuvers off Taiwan, when it exports nuclear weapons technology, or abuses human rights. It is time for China to start sending the right messages.

The United States has tried very hard to send to China the right message. For example, we have reaffirmed that we have no intention of advocating or supporting a policy of "two Chinas" or a policy of "one China, one Taiwan." Our policy is a "one China" policy and this policy rests on three legs:

- Washington-Beijing relations, built around construction engagement and based on the Shanghai communiqués;

- Washington-Taipei relations, which include helping Taiwan defend itself as called for in the Taiwan Relations Act.

- And the promotion of a healthy Beijing-Taipei relations, based on increased trade, investment, and other peaceful activities across the Taiwan Strait, which benefits the regional economy and unity.

Inherent in each leg is dialogue which serves to diminish tension, missteps and misunderstanding over perceived slights or unwelcome actions, benefiting the regional peace and the regional stability.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of both Beijing and Taipei to build healthy relations. But it is in the abiding interest of Beijing, Taipei and Washington that relations maintain a healthy, peaceful course without provocation or overreaction by any capital, and to continue to follow China's maxim of "patience and caution" in its dealings with Taiwan. Indeed, it is in the abiding interest of every capital throughout the Asia Pacific region to have one of the region's greatest powers stable and at peace.

The fourth pillar of our preventive defense strategy is to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Asian-Pacific region. In the spring of 1994, North Korea was prepared to process plutonium from its resource reactor at Yongbyon. This would have allowed it to extract enough plutonium to make five or six nuclear bombs, and it threatened to do so, all the while making menacing public remarks aimed at South Korea and Japan. A group of nations led by the United States, Republic of Korea and Japan, insisted that North Korea stop its nuclear program or face severe economic sanctions. North Korea responded by stating that the imposition of sanctions would be considered by them to be equivalent to an act of war.

Therefore, as we prepared in the spring of '94 to impose these sanctions, the United States made plans to make a major increase in its military deployments in South Korea. That turned out not to be necessary because of the firm resolve of the United States and Japan and South Korea, resolve that convinced North Korea to reverse course and sign the Agreed Framework which froze its nuclear program and drew the region back from the brink of conflict. That was a year and a half ago. Since then, our relations with North Korea have remained rocky, but the North Koreans have abided by the Agreed Framework and have sustained a freeze on their nuclear program.

Taking together, these four pillars of our preventive defense strategy in the Asian Pacific have created the conditions that minimize the threat of war. But preventive defense cannot by itself assure our security. We are still faced with dangers and potential threats that require us to maintain military forces powerful enough to be a persuasive deterrent or if the deterrent fails, powerful enough to fight and win.

We continue to maintain a nuclear deterrent for example, to protect against the danger that a major nuclear threat to the United States might reemerge in the future. And we maintain a powerful conventional military force capable of dealing with major regional conflicts.

Past regional conflicts were enormously costly in blood and treasure as demonstrated by the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Desert Storm. Today, medium sized countries -- North Korea, Iraq, Iran -- driven by virulent nationalism and armed with modern weapons can cause enormous damage to the neighbors. And to compound the threat, these nations are seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

Thus, our vital interests dictate that the United States maintain a strong deterrent force and that we maintain a strong security presence in the Asian Pacific region. A key, an absolute key to our deterrent strategy is our forward military presence, which includes about 100,000 U.S. military personnel in the Asia Pacific region. We keep about 80,000 ground and Air Force personnel in Japan and Korea, and 20,000 to 30,000 naval personnel in a powerful fleet in the Western Pacific.

These forces supplement the large and competent military forces of Japan and South Korea. And any potential aggressor knows that they are backed up by a large, highly ready force in the United States along with the airlift and the sealift that can project this force anywhere in the world.

This military force provides a security umbrella that protects the entire region. It is the damper on regional arms races and a damper on nuclear weapons proliferation. And it is America's presence that the Asian Pacific region considers the most important factor in guaranteeing its peace and stability. Indeed, it has been rightly said that the stability and security our forces provide is the oxygen that helps fuel the engine of the Pacific economic growth.

John Milton once wrote "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war." For nearly a half a century, the Pacific has been at peace. The victory of this peace has provided a renowned opportunity to ensure freedom, security, and prosperity for the new century. The duty to seize this opportunity lies in each of our nations -- in the words of our leaders, in the works of our diplomats, in the halls of our universities, and in the hearts of each of us.

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